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AUTHOR	Gladstone-Sovell, Tracey; Wilkerson, William R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper is an initial examination of prime time television's response to the events of September 11, 2001. Based on a review of the 2001-2002 television season's prime time programs, the study identifies 15 programs (out of 65 that ran the entire season) that incorporated September 11th elements. Themes of these programs are discussed as are the strategies for inclusion of episodes adopted by show producers and writers of dramatic shows for educational purposes. The paper notes that the study's findings recorded a clear and significant response by the entertainment television community. (Contains 2 tables and 37 references.) (Author/BT)

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Inclusion, Education, and Avoidance:

The Prime Time Response to September 11

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Tracey Gladstone-Sovell
Political Science Department
University of Wisconsin-River Falls

410 S. 3rd St.
River Falls, WI 54022
715-425-3318
Tracey.L.Gladstone@uwrf.edu

William R. Wilkerson
Department of Political Science
College at Oneonta, SUNY

413 Fitzelle Hall
Oneonta, NY 13820
607-436-3272
wilkerwr@oneonta.edu

Abstract: This paper is an initial examination of prime time television's response to the events of September 11. Based on a review of the 2001-2002 television season's prime time programs, we identify 15 programs that incorporated 9/11 elements. Themes of these programs are discussed as are the strategies for inclusion adopted by show producers and writers.

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It is certainly the case that Americans turned to their television sets in significant numbers as the events of September 11 unfolded. News coverage of the event saturated the airwaves on that date and for days after. Not only did the major networks pre-empt their entertainment programming, but so did the vast majority of cable outlets. However, in fairly short order "regularly scheduled programming" again took over the nation's television screens. Viewers looked to entertainment programming as part of the return to normalcy and as a means of escape from the horror of the events. But could they escape and did entertainment programming revert to "normal"?

In terms of the television era, the events of September 11, 2001 were seminal: it was the first time since the advent of television that the United States had suffered an attack on the mainland. Given the timing of the attack, most Americans were aware that something major had occurred within hours. A clear indication of the significance of television's impact on the way in which many of us experienced the event is that large numbers of people saw the second plane attack and the towers collapse "live." Some were watching morning television programming that immediately shifted to live coverage of the attack as soon as word reached them that something had happened. Others were on the road to work, or had just arrived. Upon hearing the news, they joined their co-workers around any television set that was available. Furthermore, at least 80 million Americans watched prime-time coverage of the day's events (de Moraes 2001). As a result, the attack may have seemed more like a first hand experience for more Americans than any other historic event the nation has experienced.

Network television responded by pre-empting regular programming and covering the attacks and their aftermath, without commercial interruptions, until Saturday,

September 15, 2001. As to be expected, news coverage was extensive and, for a period of time, took over parts of the prime time schedule. But at some point, the networks had to return to their regular programming. The nation was ready for relief from the news, and it was, after all, the start of the 2001–2002 television season.

How would the networks respond to this extraordinary event? This question was widely discussed in the executive suites of the major networks as well as in the press (James 2001, Shales 2001). While some encouraged escapism, with the remarkable flurry of patriotism that swept the nation in the fall of 2001 at least some response would be expected (Shales 2001). And with the eventual war on terrorism, the pressures of nationalism might be expected to further encourage the networks to incorporate September 11th themes into entertainment programming. This paper is a preliminary analysis of the ways in which entertainment programming responded to the September 11th terrorist attacks.

Relevance of the Topic

The central question that must be addressed in this section is: why does it matter to politics if entertainment television incorporates 9/11 themes? Historically political scientists argued that it does not matter. They did not consider any television programming—news or entertainment—to be politically relevant. Michael Robinson (1976) calls this the "theory of minimal consequences". Political scientists did little research in the area of media effects prior to the 1970s and the research that was done found no impact. Television, and other mass media for that matter, was "impotent". They had no influence on voter turnout, voting behavior, or even on political attitudes. Bartels

describes the state of this research as, "one of the most notable embarrassments of modern social science (1993; see also Graber 1980)."[1]

Since the early-1970s, however, a number of studies have found that television news and public affairs programming can have an impact on the public in a variety of ways. The events of the 1960s and 1970s—the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and student protests to name a few—caused political scientists to reexamine the influence that television news could have on individuals and political culture. According to Robinson, political scientists now saw television in a different light. They found in television news a unique format whose visual medium captivated people, large audiences that were growing in absolute terms as well as growing relative to newspapers, and a high-level of credibility for those who reported the news. In a number of studies, researchers have found that news and public affairs programming can have an impact on attitudes toward political institutions (Robinson 1976) and have the power to educate people on the Bill of Rights (Alper and Liedy 1969-1970). Iyengar and others have found that television news has the potential to set the political agenda and prime the public (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Iyengar and Lenart 1988). Furthermore, Ansolabehere et al. (1994) found that campaign advertising is relevant as well; the more negative campaign advertising that eligible voters watched, the less likely they were to vote. Most of these studies have been quasi-experiments. Those who have studied media effects using survey data have produced negative results, but Bartels (1993) argues that methodological shortcomings have limited previous research and he goes further to argue that media

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[1] One exception to this is line of findings Robinson notes is research by Lang and Lang (1955) who stated that, "public affairs television change the 'political climate' and this, indirectly, influence voters (1976 p. 410).

exposure indeed can change opinions. In short, researchers have found clear evidence that news and public affairs can have a "cognitive, affective, and behavioral" impact on people (McBride 1998).

While the role of news in having an impact on politics is now fairly well established, fewer studies have examined the role of political images in entertainment programming. But over the last two decades, several researchers have moved beyond news programming to examine entertainment programs. Most of this research has examined the impact of television specials and cinematic films in quasi-experimental settings. Among the programs studied have been *Roots*, *The Day After*, and *Amerika*, *The Candidate*, and *The Right Stuff*. These studies have found that entertainment can have an impact in a variety of contexts. Research on *Roots* and *The Day After* found that viewers were highly involved in the programs, but they had little impact on viewer attitudes, knowledge or behavior (Surlin 1978; Feldman and Seligman 1985). Neither had explicit political messages however. *Amerika*, had a clearer political message—the U.S. must be vigilant against the Soviet threat—and in turn it had a greater impact. Viewers were consistently more conservative on Soviet-American relations after viewing the program: they less accepting of communism and more supportive of a military buildup (Lenart and McGraw 1989). Similarly, after viewing the film *The Candidate*, the audience was more aware of candidate image as an important factor in elections, but did not become more cynical about politics (Sigelman and Sigelman 1974). Finally, audiences viewing *The Right Stuff* in 1983 had a more positive view of former astronaut and then Senator John Glenn and also viewed his run for the 1984 Democratic presidential nomination more positively (Adams et al. 1983). One important general finding is that the likelihood of

these changes occurring is contingent on the characteristics of the program and of the viewing public. Among the key characteristics are the type of exposure to the program (direct or indirect), the perceived realism of the program, the ideology of the individual and the knowledge of the individual (Lenart and McGraw 1989; Feldman and Seligman 1985). In summarizing this literature, as Feldman and Sigelman note, ""it is simply too much to expect a television program to transform people's fundamental social and political values (1985, p. 559)." Despite this caution, researchers have found that entertainment programming, along with news coverage, can have impact on what people think, what they know, and what political issues they view as important.

Can television be important more broadly? Can it have a role in helping to shape our political culture? Commentators such as Postman (1985) and Putnam (1995) certainly argue that it can. Only a few studies have looked at the impact of more typical, series-based, entertainment programming. These studies remain speculative, but are based on the assumption that entertainment programming can have an impact on political culture and political socialization. McBride (1998), for example, examines the thesis that individualism has grown in the United States in part because this value is reflected in prime-time programs. He finds that the overwhelming theme of the most popular programs—both situation comedies and dramas—is individualism. In this study and a similar one (McBride and Toburen 1996) the authors speculate that this dominant cultural theme may be linked to a decline in social capital, especially to the decline of political parties and the decline of political participation. Jackson (2001) goes further. He argues that television is linked to young American's social and political values. The programs

college students watch both influence and are influenced by their political attitudes and beliefs.

This brief literature review indicates that entertainment programming —and the discussion of entertainment programming—can produce changes in attitudes about politics. It can have an impact on socialization. Given these findings, the study of television entertainment programming after the events of September 11 is potentially important. Let us now turn to that topic.

Methodology

Due to the proliferation of entertainment programming available through cable as well as our limited time and resources, we narrowed the scope of our observations to prime time entertainment programs—dramas and situation comedies—on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and WB. Reality programs were excluded. We also confined our analysis to programs that ran throughout the entire television season. Even with this narrowed scope, we identified 65 programs that met these criteria.[2] We were not able to personally watch every episode of every program that fit into this category. Consequently, we consider our findings to be preliminary and make no claims to being either exhaustive or comprehensive. We also did not engage in a systematic content analysis of this programming. Rather, the approach we took was observational and interpretive. We watched television last season with a critical eye, making note of any indication that the events of 9/11 had made their way into the programs. We also enlisted friends, family, and students to point us to any shows we might have missed. Finally, we made use of

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[2] See appendix A for a list of all the programs that met our criteria.

Internet sites that provide episode guides and synopses to verify our observations. We reviewed show specific sites and a general Web site (epguides.com) for show synopses.

The 2001–2002 Television Season and 9/11

As noted in the previous section, 65 programs were investigated as part of this project. Table 1 provides summary information on the programs. The programs were fairly evenly distributed across the five networks. Almost one-quarter (23.1%) of the programs were set in New York City while the programs were evenly divided between comedies and dramas. These distributions were not evenly divided across the five networks. For example, none of the16 FOX programs examined were set in New York City while one-half of the 14 NBC programs took place in the United States' largest city. A similar range is found in the distribution of comedies and dramas. At one extreme, only 18.8% of FOX programs were dramas, while at the other end 50% of ABC shows were dramas. Network programming varies considerably as do the demographics of the people who view their shows.

Table 1

	Total Programs	*Programs Set in NYC*	*No. of Comedies*	*No. of Dramas*	*Programs that Incorporated 9/11*
ABC	10	2	5	5	2 (20%)
CBS	13	5	4	9	5 (38.5%)
FOX	16	0	13	3	3 (18.8%)
NBC	14	7	5	9	4 (28.6%)
WB	12	1	5	7	1 (8.3%)
Totals	**65**	**15 (23.1%)**	**32 (49.2%)**	**33 (50.8%)**	**15 (23.1%)**

These distinctions are potentially important. Dramas seem more likely to incorporate 9/11 themes than comedies. Similarly, shows set in New York City might be expected to provide more fertile environment for incorporating the events of September 11 into story lines. This was borne out by the data presented in Table 2. Only two comedies—*Friends* and *Allie McBeal*—used 9/11 themes as part of story lines. In contrast, almost 40% of dramas did so. Similarly, 40% of shows set in New York City incorporated 9/11 themes in some way while only 18% of programs set elsewhere concerned themselves with 9/11. Interestingly the producers and writers of only one of the seven comedies set in New York City—*Friends*—incorporated the events of September 11 into their program. Shows such as *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS), *Will and Grace* (NBC), *Spin City* (ABC), *Becker* (CBS), and *King of Queens* (CBS) did not include any references to the 9/11 events that we could determine. It is worth noting that the producers of a number of these shows made conscious decisions not to incorporate 9/11 into their programs. They publicly indicated that they viewed their programs as an escape and a means to return to normalcy after the events. David Kohan, one of the creators of *Will and Grace* was quoted as saying that, "Broaching the terrorism attacks in a sitcom would only trivialize them (Weinraub 2001)." Kevin Bright, a producer for *Friends* echoed this sentiment, but he also indicated that "the series would subtly acknowledge reality—characters would sometimes wear caps reading N.Y.F.D. or N.Y.P.D." *Friends* was the only sitcom where we observed this type of subtle inclusion. The comedy that faced the largest challenge was *Spin City* (ABC). The show is centered on the New York City mayor's office. The mayor on *Spin City*, the fictional Randall Winston, is no Rudy Guiliani. Rather, Winston is a patrician bungler, whose staff is in

constant crisis mode fixing his missteps. Gary David Goldberg, one of the show's creators tried to defend his program, by stating that, "Our compact with the audience is to provide an alternative reality … I can't make that leap into what's really going on. No one knows what's right or wrong here. Everyone's traumatized. I feel we don't have the right to bring this into our comedy world (Weinraub 2001)." In contrast to the comedies, five of eight New York City-based dramas worked the events of September 11 into story lines.

Table 2.

	Set in NYC	*Not Set in NYC*	*Comedy*	*Drama*
Incorporated 9/11	6 (40%)	9 (18%)	2 (6%)	13 (39.4%)
Did Not Incorporate 9/11	9 (60%)	43 (82%)	30 (94%)	20 (60.6%)
Totals	15	50	32	33

While the vast majority (76.9%) of programs during the 2001-2002 season did not deal with the events of September 11, a significant number did. When one looks at the types of programs in even a little detail, the number of shows concerning themselves with 9/11 is impressive. Those shows with significant potential for including the events of September 11 did so. By the end of the 2001–2002 television season a few patterns emerged regarding 9/11 inclusion in television programming. In the next two sections we will examine those shows that incorporated 9/11 in some depth. First, we will look at the themes that producers incorporated into story lines. Next, we will identify a typology of theme inclusion into programs.

Themes of Programs Incorporating 9/11

Producers and writers of the 15 programs that introduced September 11 story lines did so using common and identifiable themes. The thematic patterns cut across the various categories and some programs tackled more than one of these themes throughout the season. Note: several of the programs and program episodes are discussed at length later in the paper.

The most common theme dealt with the issue of Anti-Arab/Anti-Muslim backlash. Most of the illustrations of this theme came in programs that had devoted one or two entire episodes to 9/11. Among the programs to touch on this theme were *The Education Max Bickford* (CBS), *The District*, (CBS), *7th Heaven* (WB), and *NYPD Blue* (ABC) and *The West Wing (NBC).* They sent a uniform message: the backlash was a bad thing and Americans should be more tolerant of religious and cultural diversity. There was however, a wide range of difference in terms of the subtleties of how the programs addressed the particulars of the issue. For example, some programs not only denounced bigotry and violence inspired by it, they also sought to educate the public about religions that most Americans are unfamiliar with.

Another theme that was observed was the effect that 9/11 had on the public safety community. Several the crime-based dramas that are set in New York City had some inclusion of 9/11 and each of these included reference to the attack's impact on how New York City "first responders"—those public service employees who responded to the disaster in an official capacity—did their jobs. One program, *Third Watch*, made this a season long recurring theme.

A third observable theme involved the issues of terrorism and international conflict. This was clearly a focus in *The Agency,* a CBS show set inside the CIA. *The Agency* did not directly refer to 9/11, but did have a number of episodes that dealt with terrorism, Al Qaeda, bio-terrorism, and homeland security generally. Given the overall focus of this program, these themes might have been expected, although the reaction of the viewing audience to these episodes was undoubtedly different than it would have been prior to 9/11. The same comment can also be made about the NBC drama, The *West Wing*. In previous seasons, this program had dealt with issues of international terrorism and military conflict, but a number of their fictional scenarios took on a look of added realism after last September.

A fourth, related but conceptually distinct, theme could be seen in CBS's *JAG* and WB's *7th Heaven*. Both these programs drew attention to the military conflict in Afghanistan. During the second half of the season, the main characters on *JAG* were sent to Afghanistan to participate in the military operations (see detailed discussion below.) *7th Heaven* devoted an episode to honoring the memory of Master Sergeant Dwight J. Morgan, one of the early casualties in Afghanistan.

Finally, although this is a somewhat amorphous theme, it was possible to detect more symbolic patriotism and less public cynicism on television last season. Flags and NYC police and fire department symbols were observed on office desks, on the clothing worn by characters and in re-shot opening sequences. The only comedy where we were able to detect any reference to 9/11 was NBC's New York City-based *Friends*. As the show's producer had indicated, NYPD caps and FDNY t-shirts were worn by key characters, the opening graphic was redesigned to omit the silhouette of the Trade Center

from the skyline, and flags were visible in the Central Perk, the coffeehouse where many of the show's scenes take place. This trend could also be seen in *NYPD Blue* where the police officers had visibly displayed flags on their desks that were not present in past seasons. *NYPD Blue's* opening sequence showed a "kinder and gentler" NYC than that of previous seasons, including a very clear I Love (the heart symbol) NY t-shirt and shots of the new skyline.

A Typology of 9/11 Theme Inclusion

In addition, to common themes, entertainment programs on the five networks included 9/11 content in similar ways. The programs that incorporated 9/11 themes into their story lines can be grouped into three different categories: 1) season-long story line incorporation, 2) individual episode incorporation, and 3) season-long subtle and symbolic incorporation. There were two programs that incorporated 9/11 related themes into their story lines throughout the season, the hour-long dramas *JAG* (CBS) and *Third Watch* (NBC.) The category that included the largest number of show were those that devoted one or two episodes to 9/11 oriented themes, but did not make 9/11 central to the season's main story lines. Programs in this grouping include, among others, *7th Heaven*, *The Education of Max Bickford, The West Wing* and *The District*. The third grouping of programs were those that included 9/11 references throughout the season in a manner that was incidental to the plot rather than the central focus. Shows in this category include *The Agency* (CBS), *NYPD Blue* (ABC), *Law and Order* (NBC); and *Friends* (NBC). What follows is a detailed discussion of each of the typologies.

Season-long, story line incorporation. The two programs that contained season long story line incorporation of 9/11 were *Third Watch* (NBC) and *JAG* (CBS). As would be expected, *Third Watch's* inclusion focused on the first responders theme. *JAG* emphasized the military, international terrorism theme, but also had episodes that focused on legal issues raised by the War on Terrorism.

Given the premise of the show, it would have been inconceivable for *Third Watch* not to have dealt with 9/11. At the same time, the producers had to be circumspect about how they would address the issue. John Wells, the producer of *Third Watch* stated that the show was "careful about how to portray [the show's characters'] involvement. . . . We knew we couldn't do anything that implied our fictional characters were there (Levin 2001)." After halting production for over two weeks and interviewing New York City first responders, the fictional program began the season with highly praised documentary episode "In Their Own Words." The two hour program consisted of interviews with police, firefighters and paramedics who were present at ground zero in the aftermath of the attacks (Petrozzello 2001; Bianculli 2001; Collins 2001; James 2001a, b).

The next two episodes of *Third Watch*, "September Tenth" and "After Time" followed the fictional firefighters on the day prior to and the days after the attacks. The "September Tenth" episode portrayed a "normal" day, mainly via flashbacks. However, there were many shots of the time of day and the audience knew, what the characters did not, that the Eleventh was not going to be business as usual. The episode ended with the attack on the World Trade Center. "After Time" focused on the days after the attack. The firefighters put in long hours and spend their time off working on the rescue effort at "the pile." There were scenes depicting the outpouring of support that the emergency workers

received from the people of the city. There were also scenes showing a real ambivalence on the part of the characters about this response, with a number of them indicating a genuine discomfort at being thrust into the role of "heroes."

Third Watch continued to incorporate 9/11 story lines throughout the season. One involved the effects of 9/11 on a police officer. Bosco, one of the show's main characters, had witnessed the plane hitting the World Trade Center from the window of an apartment. He then rushed to the scene to help, but found himself unable to respond as he would have liked. Throughout the season, he became increasingly agitated. Eventually he is forced to undergo psychiatric treatment, and eventually, is diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress disorder. Another on-going story line concerned a paramedic, Taylor. Her father was a NYFD captain who was killed at the World Trade Center. She is transferred to the paramedic division after her fragile psychological state becomes obvious to her superiors. She also spends most of her off duty time working on the recovery effort.

Third Watch brought its 9/11 story lines to closure toward the end of the season with the episode "Two Hundred and Thirty-Three Days". The body of Taylor's father is recovered and a funeral follows. The episode explores how the first responders, especially the firefighters, have coped with the deaths of their colleagues, friends and families. The episode ended with a backyard picnic shot with the new skyline of lower Manhattan as its backdrop.

The other program to integrate 9/11 throughout the season was the CBS drama *JAG,* although the 9/11 theme did not appear until the second half of the season. As Brian Lowry noted in October, this show is "conspicuous as prime time's lone military-themed

drama (Lowry 2001)." *JAG* executive producer Donald Bellisario stated more than once early in the 2001–2002 television season that while the show was aware of its new relevance, it didn't intend to focus all that much on the event and its aftermath (Lowry 2001; Weiner 2001). He noted that they would clearly date the shows "to make it clear that the first four shows are events taking place before Sept. 11 … As of [this week's] shows, we will begin to work the information in as it is deemed necessary." He went on to state that "We'll have reservists showing up to fill some slots; there will be heightened security. We have always taken from the headlines, but this is one headline we don't want to be taking from (Lowry 2001)." This relatively low-keyed approach was altered as events, and the season, progressed.

Beginning in February, the primary story line for the rest of the *JAG* season was clearly influenced by the war on terrorism. Afghanistan became the backdrop for six episodes that aired from February though May. In first of these episodes the show's two main characters were sent to Saudi Arabia to "defend a Navy Flyer who faces court martial for violating a standing order requiring all female personnel to wear the *abaya*, the traditional Saudi dress, including a veil, when they're off the base (Holston 2002)." In following episodes JAG officers were sent to Afghanistan where they were involved in the vetting of intelligence information prior to approving bombing missions. Another episode, "First Casualty," was devoted to the interplay of journalists and the military during war. *JAG* also broadcast the first military tribunal of the war on terrorism, albeit a fictional one.

The tribunal episode received a fair amount of attention in the press (James 2002; Friedman 2002). As James (2002) put it, "In the dreams of the creators of *JAG*, … ,

United States troops have captured the No. 3 Al Qaeda leader, a man who helped plan the September 11 attacks." The JAG officers are assigned to both prosecute and defend the terrorist. "In the glorified, simple-minded vision of *JAG* the accused Al Qaeda members wonders why his appointed lawyers are doing such a find job. … 'Our way of life entitles you to a fair trial no matter how cowardly the act,' says the admiral who is defending him (James 2002)." The Al Qaeda and military themes were pursued for the rest of the season. The military theme concluded in the final episode of the season with the regular characters working to stop a terrorist attack. In the final scene of the season one of the regulars, Lt. Roberts, who has been in the field assisting in the removal of land mines, is shown with a portion of his leg blown off after a mine explodes. He had been trying to rescue an Afghani child who was playing in an area that was a known land mine location.

It is worth noting that *JAG* experienced a renewed level of popularity during the 2001–2002 season, with 10% higher ratings and finding itself in the top 20 shows of the week a number of times (James 2002). The increase in audience size began before the 9/11 themes appeared in the show.

Individual episode incorporation. A number of dramas devoted one or two episodes to 9/11 oriented themes. It was clear that the intention of the writers and producers of most of these episodes was for the episodes to have an educational purpose. The first program to self-consciously attempt this was NBC's *West Wing*. Aaron Sorkin, the main writer of the series, persuaded NBC to push back the scheduled season premier of *West Wing* and allow the program to rush into production a show intended to deal with the issues raised by September 11 (de Jonge 2001). The episode, "Isaac and Ishmael", took place during a security lock down in the White House that was caused by a terrorist

threat. A group of students were present at the time and they were subject to a lesson in religious history conducted by the White House Staff with the President and First Lady also providing input. A secondary story line had to do with an Arab member of the White House staff who was, as it turned out, unfairly subject to intense interrogation regarding his ties to Islamic organizations. The episode was designed to teach the audience more about the Islam as a religion as well as to send a cautionary message about jumping to conclusions regarding Arab-Americans. The episode was criticized for its preachy tone, but it was the first television program to respond to 9/11 in its story line and it did so in a remarkable short period of time (Tucker 2001). Consistent with Sorkin's plans, made public during the filming of "Isaac and Ishmail," the rest of the *West Wing* season did not directly refer to the events of 9/11, but did include programs that dealt with security issues raised by the event and its aftermath (de Jonge 2001).

Among the more striking illustrations of episodes devoted to "teaching" about 9/11 were those that appeared on the WB family drama *7th Heaven*. The program centers on the life of the Camden family. The program embodies "family values." The father is a minister, the mother is a full-time homemaker, and the family has seven children. While one might think that this family would represent the fulfillment of a cultural conservative's dream TV family, the program has a tendency to send out politically liberal messages. Two of last season's episodes were devoted to 9/11 themes, one, "Suspicion," focused on anti-Muslim sentiment in the community, the other, "The Known Soldier," on the consequences of the military effort in Afghanistan.

"Suspicion" was *7th Heaven*'s first 9/11 program, it aired mid season. In it Ruthie, the Camden's youngest daughter helps a Muslim friend, Yasmine, who is being bullied

because of her ethnic and religious background. The family tries to help by getting the private school that Ruthie attends (on scholarship) to admit Yasmine and offer her a scholarship as well. The family also tries to enlist neighbors to support the Muslim family by signing a petition to publicly denounce the discrimination that Yasmine's family has been experiencing. While the episode clearly sends out a message of tolerance, the story line had some interesting twists. Despite an impassioned plea from Ruthie who quotes Eleanor Roosevelt (the school is named for her), the school refuses to admit Yasmine. Ruthie's sisters also fail in their effort to gain signatures in the neighborhood. The show does end on a more inspirational note when Ruthie decides to leave her school, despite the fact that she loves it there, and her two favorite teachers follow. The final scene shows the entire family walking Yasmine to school so that she will be safe. They are joined by the teachers and some of the neighbors who had earlier refused to sign the petition.

The episode was clearly intended to educate. The WB's web site for this episode made the intention explicit by providing the following message and links: "To help parents and educators use Suspicion as a springboard to discuss prejudice and discrimination in light of September 11, as well as in a broader context, The WB is providing the following support materials, including backgrounders, suggestions for questions and activities, and resources for further research and investigation (TheWB.com 2002)." The network even provided a means for educators to get permission to tape the episode and air it in schools.

The same intention was also evident in "The Known Soldier" which appeared late in the season. The episode was an "unusual blend of fusion and reality" (AP 2002.) It

centered on the death of Staff Sgt. Dwight J. Morgan, an actual marine who was killed in Afghanistan. Ruthie was exchanging e-mails with Morgan and the entire Camden family was shaken when they find out that he has died. The program was more heavy-handed than the "Suspicion" episode, sending an obvious message of support for those serving in the military. The program included a memorial service with Sgt. Morgan's family in attendance. The web site for this episode also provides a link to a "learning guide" designed to help parents learn "how to talk about these issues with your children."[3]

Season-long subtle and symbolic incorporation. There were a number of shows that included 9/11 references and symbols in an indirect and subtle manner that was not integral to the story lines of the programs. As noted earlier, *Friends* episodes had flags and t-shirts prominently displayed. *NYPD Blue* also had a new intro and more patriotic imagery. Many of the *NYPD Blue* episodes had already been filmed prior to 9/11. The producers decided to re-shoot some scenes to include 9/11 references. The result was somewhat stilted (James 2001b.) However, by the end of the season the allusions were more natural and there were one or two sub-plots that probably would not have appeared had 9/11 not occurred, (most notably one where an Arab-American's store is vandalized.)

Law and Order (in all its variations), also set in New York and also focused on the law enforcement community, had already shot most of its season's episodes before 9/11 (James 2001b.) The event altered the network's plans for later in the season. NBC had planned a mini-series that involved the casts of all three *Law and Order* shows. It

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[3] It is worth noting that the Web site for one other *7th Heaven* episode during the 2001–2002 season that dealt with school violence also provide links to a "parent guide (thewb 2002)."

was going to be "[o]ne of the most expensive mini-series planned by the network, . . . but was canceled shortly after the attacks. The mini-series dealt with an escalation of bombings in New York by terrorists from the Middle East, followed by a threatened attack of smallpox." (Weinraub, 2001.) Eventually there were references to 9/11 and its effect in *Law and Order* although no individual episodes that had 9/11 as its central focus.

Another show that was impacted by 9/11 was *The Agency*. It was a new CBS drama set inside the Central Intelligence Agency. As such it had already shot episodes dealing with international terrorism. One such episode was scheduled to be the first show of the season. It was rescheduled. While never directly referring to 9/11, *The Agency* did allude to the events in a number of episodes dealing with terrorism and bio-terrorism. There were some cast changes during the season that had 9/11 connections. The CIA director was replace with an acting director. He was eventually replaced with a new director and then became the CIA's homeland security liaison, a position that would not have existed when the show was originally conceived.

Discussion & Conclusions

This research project set out to identify prime time television's response to the events of September 11 during the 2001-2002 television season. The question remains, what to make of the prime time response to 9/11? We will address several aspects of this question briefly. We offer no definitive answers, but we do believe that the response is significant and worthy of study. First, while our results are not all inclusive, we are confident that we will identify more references to 9/11 during the 2001-2002 television

season on further review, one conclusion seems clear: there was a clear and significant response by the entertainment television community. Over one-fifth of the 65 series that ran through the entire season incorporated 9/11 themes in one form or another. This response was particularly impressive given the timing of the attacks. Planning and production was already well underway for most shows and some had nearly completed filming many episodes by mid-September. It is also impressive given that the initial response of many television executives was one of caution and reticence to use 9/11 in their programs. The shows that included 9/11 themes range across networks and genres. They are shows that appeal to a wide range of demographic groups and include some of the top rated prime time programs of the season. Three programs—*Friends*, *Law and Order*, and *The West Wing*—that incorporated 9/11 themes were among the 10 most popular shows of the 2001-2002 season and three more—*JAG*, *The Practice*, and *NYPD Blue*—appeared in the top 25 for the season. These programs were viewed by millions of Americans. *Friends* was viewed in over 15 million households each week, while *JAG* (ranked number 17) was seen in almost 10 million homes weekly. Even the low rated *7th Heaven* was viewed in over 4.5 million households each week. It is unlikely that any other political or social event in the television age was incorporated into television culture as quickly or as extensively. And, of course, television is one only avenue of popular culture. Virtually every medium responded and in myriad ways, from new 9/11 inspired recordings by Bruce Springsteen to stories on the financial future of 9/11 victim's families in *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*.

Second, why did such a response occur? The answer to this question is not as clear-cut. The level of inclusion probably speaks to the importance of the event. But it is

worth pointing out, that the Bush administration enlisted the help of Hollywood in the war on terrorism. Karl Rove, White House Senior Advisor, met with a number of Hollywood executives in November 2001. He gave them seven points that the White House saw as the most important messages they wanted the American public to be exposed to. The messages were "The war is against terrorism, not Islam; that Americans must be called to national service; that this is a global war that needs a global response; that this is a war against evil; that American children have to be reassured; and that instead of propaganda, the war effort needs a narrative that should be told, . . . with accuracy and honesty (Cooper, 2001)." September 11 themes began to appear in entertainment programming before this meeting, but it seems reasonable to conclude that that at least some of the executives may have been at least partially influenced by Rove's message. It may also be true that some producers acted after seeing the relatively positive reactions to early actors such as *The West Wing*.

At the same time, it is also very likely that at least some inclusion most likely would have occurred without the White House asking for it – Aaron Sorkin certainly was not responding to pressure from the Bush administration when he wrote the special episode of *The West Wing*. Entertainment television is an integral aspect of American popular culture, as such it both reflects and shapes public concerns. The public was clearly concerned with terrorism and its consequences in the aftermath of 9/11. Television programming gave some of the concerns a medium for expression. Television writers and producers are part of the larger culture and they would not have been immune to some of the issues raised by 9/11 and the war on terrorism.

Third, did the inclusion of 9/11 themes have any impact on political behavior? We can make no claims here. It would be difficult to separate the impact prime time television, separate from news coverage of the events and the aftermath. But as noted in the literature review, many assume that entertainment television has the potential to affect popular culture as well as political culture. Previous research in this area indicates that the impact of entertainment programming is likely to be contingent on several factors including the knowledge of the audience, the clarity of the ideas presented and the believability of the presentation. American television viewers are widely aware of the events of September, but their attitudes and beliefs on the proper response and broader meaning of 9/11 are likely to differ. Unlike the widely viewed specials studied in earlier research, no one show seen last season will include such a broad range of Americans. It is also true that the clarity and believability of presentation varied significantly. Several lines of continued research seem potentially fruitful here. Quasi-experimental research could help to identify how different messages, and different presentations of the same messages, impacted viewing audiences. Content analysis of individual programs too could provide more detailed insights that would help us understand the potential impact of these entertainment programs on popular culture.

What we do not know at this point are what, if any, long term consequences there might be as a result of the pattern we observed during the 2001-2001 television season. Nor can we do more than speculate on what the future response of producers and network executives will be. Each of the networks has anniversary commemorations planned for September 11, 2002. There are more police programs on the fall 2002 schedule than there

were last season. Given the continuing nature of the terrorist threat and the War on Terrorism, we expect some continuing response on prime time television.

In closing, as Lenart and McGraw noted in the conclusions of their 1989 analysis on the impact of *Amerika*: "Prime-time entertainment programs reach large audiences, and these programs often have an explicit or implicit ideological foundation. As television emerges as the dominant mass medium in American society, it will become increasingly important to consider the impact of the total television environment of political attitudes, beliefs, and behavior." What was true then, is no less true today. Certainly more research is warranted on this important topic.

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Network	Program	Category	Set in NYC	Season Long Incorp.	Individual Episode Incorp.	Subtle & Symbolic Incorp.
ABC	According to Jim	Comedy				
	Alias	Drama				
	Dharma and Greg	Comedy				
	Drew Carey	Comedy				
	My Wife and Kids	Comedy				
	NYPD Blue	Drama	√		√	√
	Once & Again	Drama				
	Philly	Drama				
	Spin City	Comedy	√			
	The Practice	Drama				√
CBS	Becker	Comedy	√			
	CSI: Crime Scene Investigation	Drama				
	Education of Max Bickford	Drama			√	
	Everybody Loves Raymond	Comedy	√			
	Family Law	Drama				
	JAG	Drama		√		
	Judging Amy	Drama				
	King of Queens	Comedy	√			
	The Agency	Drama	√			√
	The District	Drama	√		√	
	The Guardian	Drama			√	
	Touched By An Angel	Drama				
	Yes Dear	Comedy				
NBC	3rd Watch	Drama	√	√		
	Crossing Jordan	Drama				
	Ed	Drama				
	ER	Drama				
	Fraiser	Comedy				
	Friends	Comedy	√			√
	Just Shoot Me	Comedy	√			
	Law & Order	Drama	√			√
	Law & Order Criminal Intent	Drama	√			
	Law & Order: SVU	Drama	√			
	Providence	Drama				
	Scrubs	Comedy				
	West Wing	Drama	√		√	√
	Will & Grace	Comedy	√			
FOX	24	Drama				√
	Allie McBeal	Comedy				√

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Network	Program	Category	Set in NYC	Season Long Incorp.	Individual Episode Incorp.	Subtle & Symbolic Incorp.
	Andy Ritcher	Comedy				
	Boston Public	Drama			√	
	Family Guy	Comedy				
	Greg the Bunny	Comedy				
	Grounded for Life	Comedy				
	Malcolm in the Middle	Comedy				
	The Simpson's	Comedy				
	That 70's Show	Comedy				
	That 80's Show	Comedy				
	The Bernie Mac Show	Comedy				
	Titus	Comedy				
	Undeclared	Comedy				
	X-Files	Drama				
	Jamie Kennedy	Comedy				
WB	7th Heaven	Drama			√ (2)	√
	Angel	Drama				
	Charmed	Drama				
	Dawson's Creek	Drama				
	Felicity	Drama	√			
	Gilmore Girls	Drama				
	Maybe its Me	Comedy				
	Raising Dad	Comedy				
	Reba	Comedy				
	Sabrina the Teenage Witch	Comedy				
	Smallville	Drama				
	Steve Harvey Show	Comedy				

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